

DESCRIPTION

FUEL CELL

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 [0001]

The present invention relates to a fuel cell using a solid polymer electrolyte, more particularly, it relates to a polymer-type fuel cell which can reduce a thickness.

10 BACKGROUND ART

[0002]

Since a polymer-type fuel cell using a solid polymer electrolyte such as a polymer electrolyte has a high energy conversion efficiency, and is a thin and small type, and is light, it has been actively developed for a home cogeneration system and a motorcar. As a structure of the prior art of such the fuel cell, a structure shown in Fig. 16 is known (e.g. see Nikkei Mechanical supplement volume "Frontier of Fuel Cell Development" published on June 29, in 2001, published by Nikkei BP, Chapter 3 PEFC, 3.1 Principles and Characteristics, p46).

20 [0003]

That is, as shown in Fig. 16, an anode 101 and a cathode 102 are disposed with holding a solid polymer electrolyte membrane 100. Further, a unit cell 105 is constructed by holding by one pair of separators 104 via a gasket 103. In each of separators 104, a gas flow path groove is formed and, by contact with an anode 101, a flow path for a reducing gas (e.g. hydrogen gas) is formed and, by contact with a cathode 102, a flow path for an oxidizing gas (e.g. oxygen gas) is formed. Each gas is supplied for an electrode reaction (chemical reaction at electrode) by the action of a catalyst carried in the

25
30

interior of an anode 101 or a cathode 102 while passing through each flow path in a unit cell 105, and generation of an electric current and ionic conduction are made.

[0004]

5 A fuel cell N is constructed by stacking a number of the unit cells 105, and electrically connecting unit cells 105 in series, and an electrode 106 can be taken out through stacked unit cells 105 on both ends. Such the fuel cell N is paid an attention in various utilities, particularly, as an electric motorcar supply or a distributed
10 supply for household use, because of characteristics being clean and highly effective.

[0005]

On the other hand, with activation of IT techniques in recent years, there is a tendency that mobile instruments such as a mobile
15 phone, a notebook computer, and a digital camera are frequently used and, as an electric supply for them, a lithium ion secondary cell is used in most cases. However, with high functionalization of mobile instruments, a consumed power is gradually increased and, as an electric supply therefor, attention has focused on a fuel cell
20 which is clean and highly effective.

[0006]

However, in the prior structure as shown in Fig. 16, since a structure has no degree of freedom, it is difficult to realize a thinner, small and lighter type required as an electric supply for mobile
25 instruments, and to make a high degree of freedom for a shape, and there is a problem of deteriorated maintenance. Further, it is difficult to supply respectively an oxidizing gas and a reducing gas in a fuel cell without mixing them, and to make a sealed structure, and it is difficult to reduce a size and a weight of a fuel cell while
30 satisfying these conditions. In other words, conventionally, as cell

parts have been interconnected with a securing part such as a bolt and a nut to apply a certain pressure to cell parts, it is necessary to enhance rigidity of each part in order to secure the sealing property, and thinning, miniaturization, weight reduction, and free shape design have been unavoidably difficult.

[0007]

Meanwhile, the following Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 58-176881 discloses a flat-type liquid fuel cell comprising a unit cell in which a liquid fuel is stored. The fuel cell has a structure in which a circumference of a laminate of a fuel electrode, an electrolyte, and an oxidizing agent electrode is integrated with a sealing material, and this is housed in a cell casing.

[0008]

However, in the aforementioned cell structure, a force for pressing a sealing material to a side wall of a laminate containing an electrode cannot be sufficiently enhanced. Therefore, for example, when a hydrogen gas fuel is pressurized to flow on a fuel electrode side, a hydrogen gas is leaked to an oxidizing agent electrode side, and there is a problem that such as reduction in an electric generating efficiency and risk of hydrogen combustion. That is, an electrode of a fuel cell has generally a porous structure and, for this reason, the aforementioned cell structure is a structure in which a pressurized hydrogen gas passes through the interior of a fuel electrode, and is easily leaked to an oxidizing agent electrode side from between a side wall of an electrolyte and a sealing material.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

Problems to be solved by the invention

[0009]

Then, an object of the present invention is to provide a fuel

cell in which sealing can be reliably made for each unit cell, thereby, enabling thinning, facilitating maintenance, and enabling miniaturization and weight reduction, and enabling free shape design.

5

Means to solve the problems

[0010]

The above object can be attained by the following present invention.

10

[0011]

15

20

25

That is, a fuel cell of the present invention is a fuel cell comprising a sheet-like solid polymer electrolyte, a cathode-side electrode plate arranged on one side of the solid polymer electrolyte, an anode-side electrode plate arranged on the other side, a cathode-side metal plate which is arranged on a surface of the cathode-side electrode plate and enables a gas to be flown to an internal side, and an anode-side metal plate which is arranged on a surface of the anode-side electrode plate and enables a fuel to be flown to an internal side, wherein a circumferential part of the solid polymer electrolyte is extended from the electrode plates on both sides, and circumferences of the metal plates on both sides are mechanically sealed in the state where they are electrically insulated, while the circumferential part is held by opposite parts of the metal plates. In the present invention, for example, a circumference of the metal plates on both sides is mechanically sealed with a bending press.

[0012]

30

In accordance with the fuel cell of the present invention, since a circumferential part of a solid polymer electrolyte extends from electrode plates on both sides, and a circumference of a metal

plate is mechanically sealed with a bending press or the like while the circumferential part is held with opposite metal plates, a sufficient pressing force is obtained between a circumferential part of a solid polymer electrolyte and a metal plate, therefore, a fuel gas can be prevented from leaking to a cathode side. In addition, since a circumference of a metal plate is sealed with a bending press in the state where it is electrically insulated, each unit cell can be reliably sealed without increasing a thickness to some extent, while short-circuit between both of them is prevented. By contacting an electrode plate and a metal plate, an electric current produced by an electrode reaction can be taken out from a metal plate. Moreover, since rigidity is not required in a cell part as compared with the previous art structure as shown in Fig. 6, each unit cell can be greatly thinned. Further, since a solid polymer electrolyte and a metal plate are used, a free planar shape and bending become possible, and size reduction, weight reduction and free shape design become possible.

[0013]

In the present invention, particularly, it is preferable that a circumferential part of the solid polymer electrolyte is extended, and is exposed from a circumference of a sealed metal plate. According to this structure, since a solid polymer electrolyte intervenes also in a part sealed with a bending press, a sealed area is increased to enhance the sealing property and, at the same time, since a circumferential part is extended to expose from a sealed part, an oxidizing gas and a reducing gas are not mixed with each other at all.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014]

Fig. 1 is an assembling perspective showing one example of a

unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a front cross-sectional view showing one example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a view showing one example of the state of lamination of a cell unit of the fuel cell of the present invention. And, (a) is a perspective before attachment of a tube, and (b) is a main part front view after attachment of a tube.

Fig. 4 is a view showing an example of use of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention. And, (a) is a left side view, and (b) is a cross-sectional view thereof seen along arrows I-I.

Fig. 5 is a front cross-sectional view showing another example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 6 is an assembling perspective showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 7 is a front cross-sectional view showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 8 is an assembling perspective showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 9 is a front cross-sectional view showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 10 is a view showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention. And, (a) is a front cross-sectional view, and (b) is a plane view showing a sealing member therefor.

Fig. 11 is an assembling perspective showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 12 is a front cross-sectional view showing other example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

Fig. 13 is a graph showing relationship between a voltage and an output of the fuel cell of the present invention obtained in

Examples 1 to 2.

Fig. 14 is a graph showing a relationship between a voltage and an output of the fuel cell of the present invention obtained in Example 3.

Fig. 15 is a graph showing a relationship between a voltage and an output of the fuel cell of the present invention obtained in Example 4.

Fig. 16 is an assembling perspective showing one example of the prior art fuel cell.

Explanation of symbols

[0015]

- 1 solid polymer electrolyte**
- 1a circumferential part**
- 2, 3 electrode plate**
- 2a, 3a flow path groove**
- 4, 5 metal plate**
- 4c, 5c inlet**
- 4d, 5d outlet**
- 6 insulating material**
- 9 flow path groove**
- 9a longitudinal groove**
- 9b transverse groove**
- S1 sealing member**

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0016]

Embodiments of the present invention will be explained below by referring to the drawings. Fig. 1 is an assembling perspective showing one example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention, and Fig. 2 is a front cross-sectional view showing one

example of a unit cell of the fuel cell of the present invention.

[0017]

The fuel cell of the present invention is provided with a sheet-like solid polymer electrolyte 1, and one pair of electrode plates 2, 3 arranged on both sides of the solid polymer electrolyte 1, as shown in Fig. 1 to Fig. 2. One pair of electrode plates 2, 3 consist of a cathode-side electrode plate 2 and an anode-side electrode plate 3.

[0018]

As the solid polymer electrolyte 1, any solid polymer electrolytes can be used as far as they are used in the previous solid polymer membrane-type cells. From a viewpoint of chemical stability and electrical conductivity, a cationic exchange membrane comprising a perfluorocarbon polymer having a sulfonic acid group which is a superstrong acid is suitably used. As such the cationic exchange membrane, Nafion (registered trade mark) is suitably used.

[0019]

In addition, for example, a porous membrane comprising a fluorine resin such as polytetrafluoroethylene etc. impregnated with the Nafion or other ion conducting substance, and a porous membrane and a non-woven fabric comprising a polyolefin resin such as polyethylene and polypropylene carrying the Nafion or other ion conducting substance may be used.

[0020]

As a thickness of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 becomes smaller, this is effective for thinning of the whole. However, when the ion conducting function, a strength and the handling property are taken into consideration, 10 to 300 μ m is usable, and 25 to 50 μ m is preferable.

[0021]

As electrode plates 2, 3, electrode plates exerting the function as a gas diffusing layer to perform supply and discharge of a fuel gas, an oxidizing gas and a water steam, and exerting the current collecting function can be used. As electrode plates 2, 3, the same or different plates can be used, and it is preferable that a catalyst having the electrode catalyzing action is carried in a substrate therefor. It is preferable that a catalyst is carried at least on inner surfaces 2b, 3b contacting with a solid polymer electrolyte 1.

[0022]

As an electrode substrate, for example, fibrous carbon such as a carbon paper and a carbon fiber non-woven fabric, and an electrically conductive porous material such as an aggregate of electrically conductive polymer fibers can be used. Generally, electrode plates 2, 3 are manufactured by adding a water-repellent material such as a fluorine resin etc. to such the electrically conductive porous material. When a catalyst is carried, electrode plates are formed by mixing a catalyst such as platinum fine particles and a water-repellent material such as a fluorine resin etc., mixing a solvent with this to obtain a paste or an ink, and coating this on one side of an electrode substrate facing a solid polymer electrolyte membrane.

[0023]

Generally, electrode plates 2, 3 and a solid polymer electrolyte 1 are designed depending on a reducing gas and an oxidizing gas which are supplied to a fuel cell. In the present invention, as an oxidizing gas, an oxygen gas and the air are used and, as a reducing gas, a hydrogen gas is used. Alternatively, in place of a reducing gas, methanol and dimethyl ether may be used.

[0024]

For example, when a hydrogen gas and the air are used, since

a reaction between an oxygen and a hydrogen ion occurs to produce water on an electrode on a side of air supply (air electrode), the electrode is preferably designed depending on such the electrode reaction. Particularly, under the operating condition of low
5 working temperature, high current density and high gas utilizing rate, in particular, in an air electrode producing water, choking (flooding) phenomenon of an electrode porous body easily occurs due to condensation of a water steam. Therefore, in order to obtain the stable property of a fuel cell over a long period of time, it is effective
10 to maintain the water-repellency of an electrode so as not to cause flooding phenomenon.

[0025]

As a catalyst, at least one kind of metal selected from platinum, palladium, ruthenium, rhodium, silver, nickel, iron,
15 copper, cobalt and molybdenum, or an oxide thereof can be used, and these catalysts which have been carried in carbon black or the like in advance may be used.

[0026]

As a thickness of electrode plates 2, 3 becomes smaller, this is
20 effective for thinning of the whole and, in view of an electrode reaction, a strength and the handling property, 50 to 500 μ m is preferable.

[0027]

Although electrode plates 2, 3 and a solid polymer electrolyte
25 1 may be laminated and integrated in advance by adhering, fusing or the like, they may be simply laminated and arranged. Such the laminate may be obtained as a membrane electrode assembly (MEA), and this may be used.

[0028]

30 One pair of metal plates 4, 5 are arranged on both sides of the

electrode plates 2, 3. One pair of metal plates 4, 5 consist of a cathode-side metal plate 4 which is arranged on a surface of a cathode-side electrode plate 2 and enables a gas to be flown to an internal side, and an anode-side metal plate 5 which is arranged on a surface of an anode-side electrode plate 3 and enables a fuel to be flown to an internal side. In the present embodiment, metal plates 4, 5 are provided with a flow path groove 9, and inlets 4c, 5c and outlets 4d, 5d communicating therewith.

[0029]

As metal plates 4, 5, any metal may be used as far as it does not adversely affect on an electrode reaction. However, from a viewpoint of an elongation, a weight, an elastic modulus, a strength, corrosion resistance, press processibility, and etching processibility, a stainless plate, and nickel are preferable.

[0030]

A flow path groove 9 provided on metal plates 4, 5 may have any planar shape or cross-sectional shape as far as a flow path for a hydrogen gas or the like can be formed by contact with electrode plates 2, 3. However, in view of a flow path density, a lamination density at lamination, and bendability, it is preferable that a longitudinal groove 9a parallel with one side of metal plates 4, 5 and a transverse groove 9b perpendicular to one side of metal plates 4, 5 are mainly formed. In the present embodiment, a plurality of (3 in an example shown) longitudinal grooves 9a are connected in series with transverse grooves 9b, thereby, a flow path density and a flow path length are balanced.

[0031]

A part (e.g. transverse groove 9b) of flow path grooves 9 of such the metal plates 4, 5 may be formed on an external surface of electrode plates 2, 3. As a method of forming flow path grooves 2a,

3a on an external side of electrode plates 2, 3, a mechanical method such as heat pressing and cutting may be used and, from a viewpoint of proper fine processing, it is preferable to perform groove processing by laser irradiation. Also from a viewpoint of laser irradiation, as a substrate for electrode plates 2, 3, an aggregate of fibrous carbon is preferable.

[0032]

Single or a plurality of inlets 4c, 5c and outlets 4d, 5d communicating with flow path grooves 9 of metal plates 4, 5 may be formed. As a thickness of metal plates 4, 5 becomes smaller, this is effective for thinning of the whole and, in view of a strength, an elongation, a weight, an elastic modulus, and the handling property, 50 to 500 μ m is preferable.

[0033]

Examples of a method of forming flow path grooves 9 on metal plates 4, 5 include a mechanical method such as press processing and cutting, and a chemical method such as etching. In the present embodiment, an example is shown in which flow path grooves 9 are formed by deformation of a metal plate by press processing. By performing formation of grooves on metal plates 4, 5 by press processing, it becomes possible to manufacture metal plates 4, 5 advantageously in respect of the cost. In addition, in metal plates 4, 5 with grooves formed by press processing, increase in a thickness can be minimized, and it becomes possible not only to thin a fuel cell but also to reliably perform sealing every unit cell.

On an upper side of a metal plate 4 of Fig. 1, a convex part 9c of a flow path groove 9 with press processing is shown.

[0034]

Particularly, in a flow path groove 9 with press processing, a width of 0.1 to 10 mm, and a depth of 0.1 to 10 mm is preferable. In

addition, as a cross-sectional shape of a flow path groove 9, a general square, a general trapezoid, a general hemicircle, and a V-shape are preferable.

[0035]

5 In the present invention, a circumferential part 1a of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 extends from the aforementioned electrode plates 4, 5 on both sides, and a circumference of the metal plates 4, 5 on both sides is mechanically sealed with holding the circumferential part 1a by opposite parts of the metal plates 4, 5, in
10 the state where it is electrically insulated. Mechanical sealing can be performed, for example, by bending pressing, that is, so-called caulking. In the present embodiment, an example is shown in which a circumferential part 1a of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 is held by metal plates 4, 5 while an insulating material 6 intervenes
15 and, at the same time, a circumference of metal plates 4, 5 is sealed by caulking while an insulating material 6 intervenes.

[0036]

In the present invention, upon caulking, as shown in Fig. 2, a structure in which a solid polymer electrolyte 1 is held by
20 circumferences of metal plates 4, 5 is preferable, and a structure in which a solid polymer electrolyte 1 is held while an insulating material 6 intervenes is more preferable. According to such the structure, flowing of a gas or the like from one of electrode plates 2, 3 into the other can be effectively prevented.

25 [0037]

As an insulating material 6, a sheet-like resin, rubber, thermoplastic elastomer and ceramic can be used and, in order to enhance sealability, a resin, a rubber, and a thermoplastic elastomer are preferable. Alternatively, an insulating material 6 may be
30 integrated with metal plates 4, 5 in advance by adhering to or

coating on circumferences of metal plates 4, 5 directly or via a pressure-sensitive adhesive.

[0038]

As a caulking structure, a structure shown in Fig. 2 is preferable from a viewpoint of sealability, easiness of manufacturing, and a thickness. That is, a caulking structure is preferable in which an external circumferential part 5a of one metal plate 5 is greater than an external circumferential part 4a of the other metal plate, an external circumferential part 5a of one metal plate 5 is turned up so as to holding-pressing an external circumferential part 4a of the other metal plate 4 while an insulating material 6 intervenes. In this caulking structure, it is preferable that a step is provided on an external circumferential part 4a of a metal plate 4 by press processing or the like. Such the caulking structure itself is known as metal processing, and can be formed by the known caulking apparatus.

[0039]

In the present invention, single or a plurality of unit cells UCs as shown in Fig. 2 can be used, and it is preferable that a unit cell UC is constructed of a solid polymer electrolyte 1, one pair of electrode plates 2, 3, and one pair of metal plates 4, 5, and a plurality of the unit cells UCs are laminated. According to the present invention, a high output fuel cell can be provided without applying a certain pressure to cell parts by interconnection with a securing part of a bolt and a nut.

[0040]

When a plurality of unit cells are laminated, although it is possible to laminate unit cells by providing a spacer capable of forming a flow path for a gas or the like between unit cells UCs, it is preferable to laminate unit cells via no spacer as shown in Fig. 3,

from a viewpoint of thinning and a degree of freedom of design.

[0041]

In addition, it is preferable that convex parts 9c of flow path grooves 9 of metal plates 4, 5 are formed parallel at equal intervals, and convex parts 9c of respective unit cells UCs are fit to each other. Thereby, a thickness at lamination of unit cells UCs can be further reduced.

[0042]

In an embodiment shown in Fig. 3, an inlet 4c and an outlet 4d for a hydrogen gas or the like are provided around one side of a unit cell UC (metal plates 4, 5), an inlet 5c and an outlet 5d for the air or the like are provided on a back of opposing one side, and respective unit cells UCs are laminated by shifting them, so as to expose them. In this state, as shown in Fig. 3 (b), by connecting a branch tube 12 of a tube 10 in which a branch tube 12 is branched from a main tube 11, to an inlet 4c, a hydrogen gas or the like can be injected. By connecting such the tube 10 to an inlet 5c, an outlet 4d, and an outlet 5d, it becomes possible to inject and discharge an oxidizing gas and a reducing gas.

[0043]

On the other hand, by contacting metal plates, unit cells UCs are connected in series, and a current at a voltage depending on the lamination number can be taken out from unit cells UCs at both ends. Alternatively, a spacer is provided (not shown) every plural unit cells UCs, and a current may be taken out every unit cell UC.

[0044]

In addition, when a unit cell is used, a tube for supplying a fuel can be directly connected to an inlet and an outlet of a metal plate for a fuel and, from a viewpoint of thinning of a fuel cell, it is preferable to provide a tube joint having a pipe which is small in a

thickness and is parallel with a surface of a metal plate.

[0045]

Since the fuel cell of the present invention can be reduced in a thickness, is a small type, is light, and can be freely designed with a shape, it can be suitably used, particularly, in mobile instruments such as a mobile phone, a notebook computer and the like.

[0046]

In addition, when a current is take out, an embodiment as shown in Fig. 4 (a) to (b) is possible. That is, the embodiment has a caulking structure in which an external circumferential part 5a of one metal plate 5 is greater than an external circumferential part 4a of the other metal plate, and the external circumferential part 5a of one metal plate 5 is turned up so as to holding-pressing the external circumferential part 4a of the other metal plate 4 and, at the same time, a surface of the other metal plate 4 and a surface of the turned up external circumferential part 5a are used as an current taking out part (e.g. cathode and anode). In that case, as shown in the figure, it is preferable that a surface of the other metal plate 4 and a surface (upper side in the figure) of the turned up external circumferential part 5a are at the same level or approximately the same level. Thereby, contact between a current taking out part and a contact point terminal on a cell holder side can be more preferably performed.

[0047]

In addition, in the embodiment shown in Fig. 4 (a) to (b), by contacting plate spring contact point terminals 21, 22 fixed on an apparatus body side of electronic instruments with a current taking out part of a cell, a current can be taken out with lead wires 23, 24.

[0048]

Any current taking out form can be used, a straight wire or a

lead wire can be connected to a cell with a solder, and a connector can be provided on a cell.

[0049]

[Other embodiment]

5 Other embodiment of the present invention will be explained below.

[0050]

10 (1) The aforementioned embodiment showed an example in which a flow path groove formed by press processing, and an inlet and a outlet communicating the flow path groove are provided on a metal plate. In the present invention, as shown in Fig. 5, it is preferable that a flow path groove 9 formed by etching, and inlets 4c, 5c and outlets 4d, 5d communicating with the flow path groove 9 are provided on metal plates 4, 5. By forming grooves on metal plates 4, 5 by etching, it becomes possible to easily form grooves also on a metal plate having high rigidity and, due to the rigidity, it becomes easy to apply a pressure to a membrane electrode assembly, gas leakage can be reduced, and a high output (see Fig. 13) can be obtained.

20 [0051]

In a flow path groove 9 by etching, a width of 0.1 to 10 mm, and a depth of 0.05 to 1 mm are preferable. In addition, as a cross-sectional shape of a flow path groove 9, a general square, a general trapezoid, a general hemicircle, and a V-shape are preferable.

25 [0052]

Etching can be performed using an etchant depending on a kind of metal plates 4, 5 after an etching resist having a predetermined shape is formed on a metal surface, for example, using a dry film resist. In addition, by selectively performing etching every metal using a laminated plate of two or more kinds of

30

metals, a cross-sectional shape of a flow path groove 9 can be controlled at a higher precision. In addition, inlets 4c, 5c and outlets 4d, 5d communicating with a flow path groove 9 can be also formed by etching.

5 [0053]

An embodiment shown in Fig. 5 is an example in which a thickness of SUS at a caulking part of metal plates 4, 5 is reduced. Like this, by etching a caulking part to a suitable thickness, sealing by caulking can be performed more easily. From this point of view,
10 a thickness of a caulking part is preferably 0.05 to 0.3 mm.

[0054]

(2) The aforementioned embodiment showed an example in which a flow path groove for a fuel or the like is formed on a metal plate arranged on a surface of an electrode plate. In the present
15 invention, as shown in Fig. 6 to Fig. 7, flow path grooves 2a, 3a for a fuel or the like may be formed on a side of electrode plates 2, 3. Moreover, it is preferable that flow path grooves 2a, 3a are formed on an external surface of a cathode-side electrode plate 2 and/or an anode-side electrode plate 3 and, at the same time, inlets 4c, 5c and
20 outlets 4d, 5d communicating with the flow path grooves 2a, 3a are provided on metal plates 4, 5 arranged on a surface thereof.

[0055]

As a method of forming flow path grooves 2a, 3a on an external surface of electrode plates 2, 3, a mechanical method such
25 as heat pressing and cutting may be used and, from a viewpoint of suitable fine processing, it is preferable to perform groove processing by laser irradiation. From a viewpoint of laser irradiation, as a substrate for electrode plates 2, 3, an aggregate of fibrous carbon is preferable.

30 [0056]

As a thickness of electrode plates 2, 3 is smaller, this is effective for thinning of the whole. In view of an electrode reaction, a strength, and the handling property, 50 to 500 μ m is usable, and 200 to 350 μ m is preferable. In addition, as a depth of flow path grooves 2a, 3a, 100 to 500 μ m is preferable in order to secure a sufficient flow path.

[0057]

In this embodiment, electrode plates 2, 3 are preferably such that a catalyst is carried on at least one side of an aggregate of fibrous carbon, and a flow path groove from which the fibrous carbon has been removed by laser irradiation, is formed on the other surface.

[0058]

Like this, by using an aggregate of fibrous carbon as an electrode material, diffusivity of a gas and current collecting efficiency become better, and an electrode reaction can be promoted by a carried catalyst. In addition, since fibrous carbon can be subjected to fine processing by a method such as laser irradiation, and a flow path groove from which fibrous carbon has been removed is formed, a fine gas flow path can be formed while gas diffusivity is maintained, as compared with an electrode plate obtained by press processing.

[0059]

(3) The aforementioned embodiment showed an example in which a flow path groove for a gas such as the air etc. is formed on a metal plate on a cathode side, or an electrode plate. In the present invention, it is also possible to omit a flow path groove on a cathode side. That is, if necessary, a flow path groove, an inlet and a outlet for a fuel or a gas, and an opening part can be provided on metal plates 4, 5. For example, the air can be naturally supplied through

an opening part, or a outlet for a fuel gas can be also omitted.

[0060]

For example, as shown in Fig. 8 to Fig. 9, an opening part 4e for supplying oxygen in the air may be provided on a metal plate 4 on a cathode side without providing a flow path groove. An opening part 4e may have any number, shape, size and formation position as far as a cathode-side electrode plate 2 can be exposed. However, in view of an efficiency of supplying oxygen in the air, and the effect of collecting a current from a cathode-side electrode plate 2, an area of an opening part 4e is preferably 10 to 50 %, particularly preferably 20 to 40 % an area of a cathode-side electrode plate 2. In an opening part 4c of a cathode-side metal plate 4, for example, a plurality of circular pores or slits may be provided regularly or randomly, or an opening part may be provided with a metal mesh.

[0061]

Since a caulking structure is the same as that of Fig. 2, explanation will be repeated here. A construction of a flow path of an anode-side metal plate 5 is the same as that shown in Figs. 1 to 2.

[0062]

(4) The aforementioned embodiment showed an example in which a circumferential part 1a of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 is held by metal plates 4, 5 while an insulating material 6 intervenes, as shown in Fig. 2. In the present invention, a structure in which a circumferential part 1a is directly held by metal plates 4, 5 may be used. Alternatively, a sealing member may intervene between both of them. In particular, when a thickness of a solid polymer electrolyte is smaller, by holding a sealing member by metal plates on both sides like this, mixing and leakage of fluids (e.g. fuel gas and oxidizing gas) on both sides of a solid polymer electrolyte can be effectively prevented.

[0063]

When a sealing member intervenes, a sealing member S1 may intervene in the form shown in Fig 10 (a) to (b). In this embodiment, a circumferential part 1a of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 is held by metal plates 4, 5 on both sides via an annular sealing member S1. Thereupon, it is particularly preferable to hold with external circumferential parts 4a, 5a of metal plates 4, 5 from a viewpoint of improvement in the sealability due to enhanced holding pressure.

[0064]

As shown in Fig. 10 (b), an annular sealing member S1 has an annular shape along a circumferential part 1a of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 and, in context with a caulking structure, four corners of an external circumference have a round shape. A sealing member S1 may simply exert holding, or may be adhered to a circumference of metal plates 4, 5 or a solid polymer electrolyte 1 directly or via a pressure-sensitive adhesive.

[0065]

A thickness of an annular sealing member S1 depends on a thickness of a solid polymer electrolyte 1, and is preferably 20 to 200 μ m. In addition, as a material for a sealing member S1, a material having elasticity is preferable, and a resin such as a silicone-based resin and a fluorine-based resin, a rubber, and a thermoplastic elastomer are preferable.

[0066]

(5) The aforementioned embodiment showed an example in which a circumferential part of a solid polymer electrolyte is not exposed from a circumference of a sealed metal plate. In the present invention, as shown in Fig. 11 to Fig. 12, a circumferential part 1a of a solid polymer electrolyte 1 may be extended to be exposed from a circumference of sealed metal plates 4, 5. In this

case, an insulating material may be separately provided as in the
aforementioned embodiment, but short-circuit between metal plates
4, 5 can be prevented only by a solid polymer electrolyte 1 without
providing an insulating material.

5 [0067]

[Examples]

The present invention will be explained below by way of
Examples, but the present invention is not limited to these
Examples at all.

10 [0068]

[Example 1]

Twenty one grooves (width 0.8 mm, depth 0.2 mm, interval
1.6 mm) were provided on SUS (50 mm×26 mm×0.08 mm thickness)
having corrosion resistance by press processing. An insulating
sheet (50 mm×26 mm×2 mm width, thickness 80 μ m) was then
laminated to SUS. A membrane electrode assembly (49.3 mm×25.3
mm) was manufactured as described below. As a platinum catalyst,
a carbon catalyst carrying 20 % platinum (EC-20-PTC) manufactured
by US Electrochem was used. This platinum catalyst, carbon black
(Akzo; Ketchen Black EC) and polyvinylidene fluoride (Kiner) were
mixed at a ratio of 75 % by weight, 15 % by weight, and 10 % by
weight, dimethylformamide was added to the mixture of a platinum
catalyst, carbon black and polyvinylidene fluoride at such a ratio
that a 2.5 weight% polyvinylidene fluoride solution was obtained,
and the materials were dissolved and mixed in a mortar to prepare a
catalyst paste. A carbon paper (TGP-H-90 manufactured by Toray
Industries, Inc., thickness 370 μ m) was cut into 20 mm×43 mm,
about 20 mg of the above-prepared catalyst paste was coated thereon
with a spatula, and this was dried in a hot air circulating dryer at
80°C. In this way, a carbon paper carrying 4 mg of a catalyst

composition was prepared. An amount of platinum to be carried is 0.6 mg/cm².

[0069]

Using the above-prepared platinum catalyst-carrying carbon paper, and a Nafion film (Nafion 112 manufactured by Du Pont Kabushiki Kaisha) (25.3 mm×49.3 mm, thickness 50 μm) as a solid polymer electrolyte (cation exchange membrane), both sides thereof were hot pressed using a mold for 2 minutes under the condition of 135°C and 2 MPa. The thus obtained membrane electrode assembly was held by two of the SUS plates at a center thereof, and this was caulked as shown in Fig. 2, thereby, a thin miniature micro-fuel cell having external dimension 50 mm×26 mm×1.4 mm thickness could be obtained.

[0070]

This micro-fuel cell was assessed for cell properties. The fuel cell properties were assessed using a pure hydrogen gas and a pure oxygen gas at room temperature employing a fuel cell assessing system manufactured by TOYO Corporation. A gas flow rate was 0.2 L/min. The resulting maximum output density was 400 mW/cm² per electrode area (Fig. 13). By laminating six fuel cells to form series connection, an output of 18 W as a fuel cell was obtained. The feature of the present invention is in that a cell is thin as a thickness of 1.4 mm, and a high output as 400 mW/cm² per unit electrode area is obtained.

[0071]

[Example 2]

According to the same manner as that of Example 1 except that SUS (50 mm×26 mm×0.3 mm thickness) having a different thickness was used, and a groove (width 0.8 mm, depth 0.2 mm, interval 1.6 mm) was formed by changing a processing method to

etching with an aqueous ferric chloride solution, a thin miniature micro-fuel cell shown in Fig. 4 was obtained. In Fig. 4, a thickness of SUS at a caulking part was also reduced by etching (thickness 0.1 mm).

5 [0072]

Cell properties of this micro-fuel cell were assessed as in Example 1. The resulting maximum output density was 450 mW/cm² per electrode area (Fig.13). Six fuel cells were laminated to obtain series connection, and output of 20W as a fuel cell was
10 obtained. The feature of the present invention is in that a cell is thin as a thickness of 1.4 mm, and a high output as 450 mW/cm² per unit electrode area is obtained.

[0073]

[Reference Example 1]

15 According to the same manner as that of Example 2 except that a thickness of a solid polymer electrolyte was 25 μ m (1/2 of that of Example 2), a fuel cell was prepared. At that time, the presence or the absence of gas mixing in a cell and the presence or the absence of gas leakage to the outside of a cell were investigated in the case
20 where a sealing member (material: fluorine resin, thickness 100 μ m) having a shape shown in Fig.10 (b) was used, or not used.

[0074]

As a result, when a sealing member was used, gas mixing and gas leakage did not occur at a ratio of 10/10, on contrast, when a
25 sealing member was not used, gas mixing occurred at a ratio of 4/10, and gas leakage occurred at a ratio of 3/10.

[0075]

[Example 3]

Using SUS (50 mm \times 26 mm \times 0.08 mm thickness) having
30 corrosion resistance, an insulating seat (50 mm \times 26 mm \times 2 mm width,

thickness 70 μ m) was laminated on the SUS. A membrane electrode assembly (49.3 mm \times 25.3 mm) was prepared as described below. As a platinum catalyst, a 20% platinum-carrying carbon catalyst (EC-20-PTC) manufactured by US Electrochem was used. This platinum catalyst, carbon black (Akzo; Ketchen Black EC) and polyvinylidene fluoride (Kiner) were mixed at a ratio of 75 % by weight, 15 % by weight, and 10 % by weight, dimethylformamide was added to the mixture of a platinum catalyst, carbon black and polyvinylidene fluoride at such a ratio that a 2.5 weight% polyvinylidene fluoride solution was obtained, and the materials were dissolved and mixed in a mortar to prepare a catalyst paste. A carbon paper (TGP-H-90 manufactured by Toray Industries, Inc., thickness 370 μ m) was cut into 20 mm \times 43 mm, about 20 mg of the above-prepared catalyst paste was coated thereon with a spatula, and this was dried in a hot air circulating dryer at 80°C. In this way, a carbon paper carrying 4 mg of a catalyst composition was prepared. An amount of platinum to be carried is 0.6 mg/cm².

[0076]

A side opposite to a catalyst layer of the above-prepared platinum catalyst-carrying carbon paper was subjected to groove processing (width: 2.3 mm, depth: 0.2 mm, interval: 2.3 mm) using semiconductor laser. Then, using a Nafion film (Nafion 112 manufactured by Du Pont Kabushiki Kaisha) (25.3 mm \times 49.3 mm, thickness 50 μ m) as a solid polymer electrolyte (cation exchange membrane), both sides thereof were hot pressed using a mold for 2 minutes under the condition of 135°C and 2 MPa. The thus obtained membrane electrode assembly was held by two of the SUS plates at a center thereof, and this was caulked as shown in Fig. 7, thereby, a thin miniature micro-fuel cell having external dimension 50 mm \times 26 mm \times 1.0 mm thickness could be obtained.

[0077]

This micro-fuel cell was assessed for cell properties. The fuel cell properties were assessed using a pure hydrogen gas and a pure oxygen gas at room temperature employing a fuel cell assessing system manufactured by TOYO Corporation. A gas flow rate was 0.2 L/min. The resulting maximum output density was 380 mW/cm² per electrode area (Fig. 14). Then, by laminating six fuel cells to form series connection, an output of 17.5 W as a fuel cell was obtained. The feature of the present invention is in that a cell is thin as a thickness of 1.0 mm, and a high output as 380 mW/cm² per unit electrode area is obtained and, since an end plate is planar, lamination is easy, and series connection is possible.

[0078]

[Example 4]

Twenty one grooves (width 0.8 mm, depth 0.2 mm, interval 1.6 mm) were provided on SUS (50 mm×26 mm×0.08 mm thickness) having corrosion resistance by press processing. A membrane electrode assembly (52.3 mm×28.3 mm) was manufactured as described below. As a platinum catalyst, a carbon catalyst carrying 20 % platinum (EC-20-PTC) manufactured by US Electrochem was used. This platinum catalyst, carbon black (Akzo; Ketchen Black EC) and polyvinylidene fluoride (Kiner) were mixed at a ratio of 75 % by weight, 15 % by weight, and 10 % by weight, dimethylformamide was added to the mixture of a platinum catalyst, carbon black and polyvinylidene fluoride at such a ratio that a 2.5 weight% polyvinylidene fluoride solution was obtained, and the materials were dissolved and mixed in a mortar to prepare a catalyst paste. A carbon paper (TGP-H-90 manufactured by Toray Industries, Inc., thickness 370μm) was cut into 20 mm×43 mm, about 20 mg of the above-prepared catalyst paste was coated thereon with a spatula, and

this was dried in a hot air circulating dryer at 80°C. In this way, a carbon paper carrying 4 mg of a catalyst composition was prepared. An amount of platinum to be carried is 0.6 mg/cm².

[0079]

5 Using the above-prepared platinum catalyst-carrying carbon paper, and a Nafion film (Nafion 112 manufactured by Du Pont Kabushiki Kaisha) (52.3 mm×28.3 mm, thickness 25 μm) as a solid polymer electrolyte (cation exchange membrane), both sides thereof were hot pressed using a mold for 2 minutes under the condition of
10 135°C and 2 MPa. The thus obtained membrane electrode assembly was held by two of the SUS plates at a center thereof, and this was caulked as shown in Fig. 12, thereby, a thin miniature micro-fuel cell having external dimension 50 mm×26 mm×1.4 mm thickness could be obtained.

15 [0080]

 This micro-fuel cell was assessed for cell properties. The fuel cell properties were assessed using a pure hydrogen gas and the air at room temperature employing a fuel cell assessing system manufactured by TOYO Corporation. A hydrogen gas flow rate was
20 0.1 L/min. An air flow rate was 0.2 L/min. And, the output property per unit cell is shown in Fig.15. By utilizing a caulking structure in accordance with the present invention, the property which can be sufficiently put into practice was obtained.